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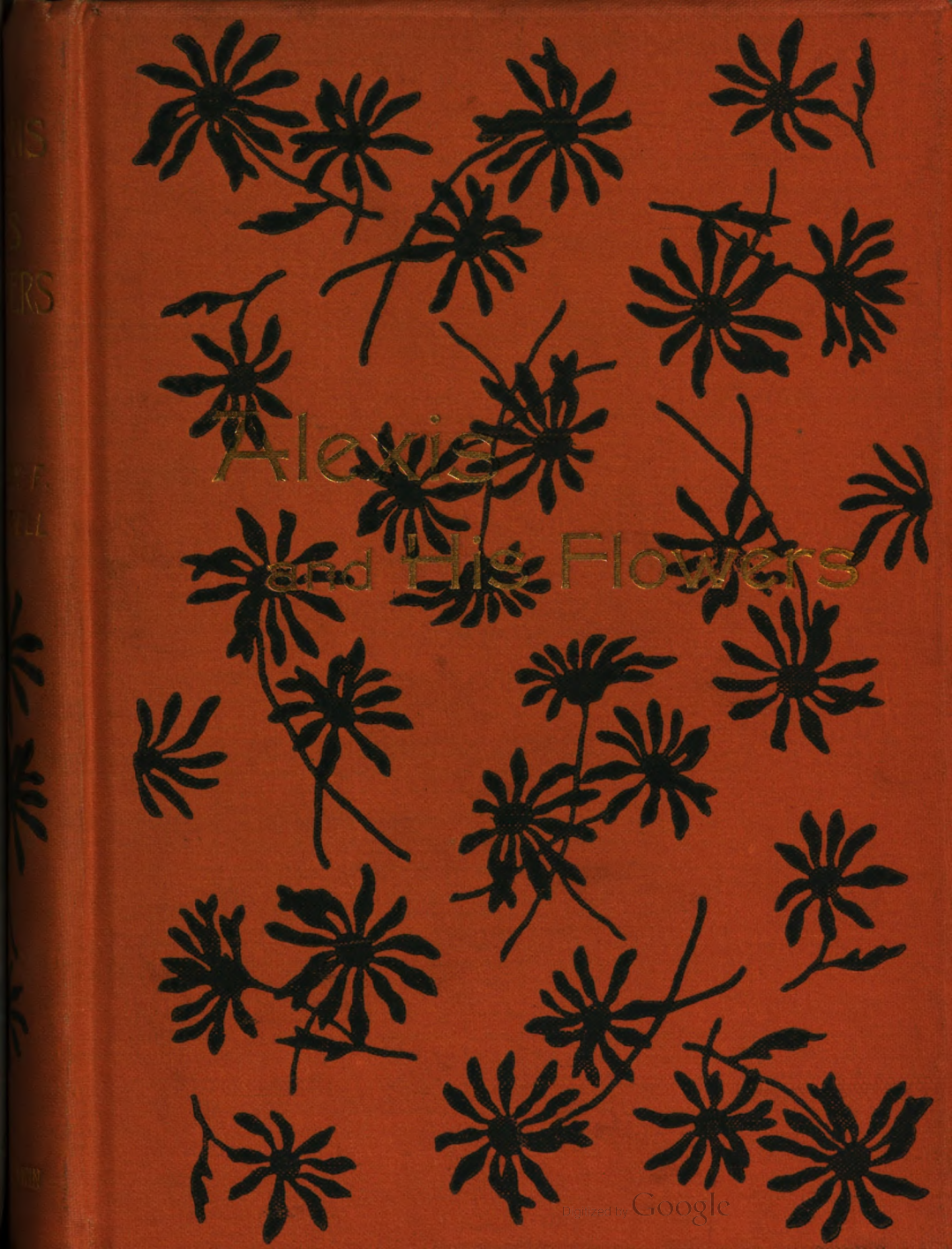

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Saint Mary's Convent Kingstown.

Perseverance Gains the Crown.

Adjudged at the Summer Examinations
to Miss M. Fullerton
for her attention and proficiency
in the 2nd Class of English.
Junior, July 17th 1895.

Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with
God and Men.

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ALEXIS AND HIS FLOWERS

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Nature the old nurse took
The child upon her knee,
Saying, "Here is a story book
Thy Father hath written for thee.

"Come wander with me," she said,
"In regions yet untrod,
And read what is still unread
From the manuscripts of God."

Longfellow.

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ALEXIS AND HIS FLOWERS

FLOWER LORE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

BY

BEATRIX F. CRESSWELL

ILLUSTRATED BY HENRIETTA CRESSWELL

London

T. FISHER UNWIN

PATERNOSTER SQUARE

MDCCCXCI

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GOOD-BYE TO THE OLD GARDEN. THE GREEN-HOUSE FLOWERS.

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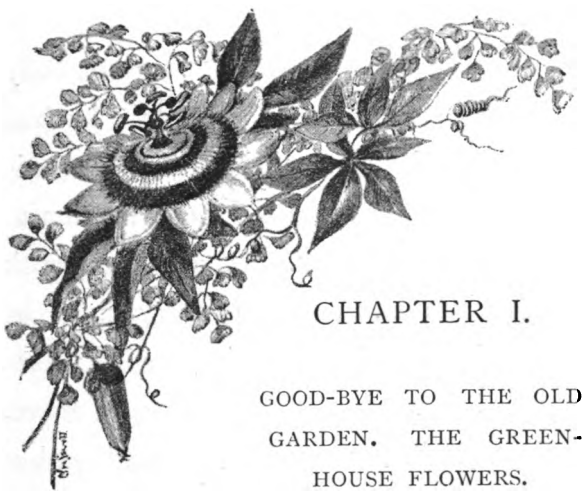

CHAPTER I.

GOOD-BYE TO THE OLD GARDEN. THE GREEN-HOUSE FLOWERS.

A LITTLE boy was walking, slowly and sorrowfully, along the paths of an old-fashioned garden. It was winter time so that there were no flowers; some had gone underground, others were dry and leafless, and in some places their presence was

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represented by white labels. This only made Alexis the more unhappy; he had to say good-bye to the garden, and his favourite flowers were not there for him to say farewell to them. In another month or two the earth would everywhere be stirred by the plants coming to life; here would be a mass of Snowdrops; there, under the window, the Winter Aconites; but by that time Alexis would be miles away, and other people have the pleasure of watching the flowers.

The Rectory, with its rambling garden, had been his home ever since he had been brought there, a little baby, from India, to live with his mother's uncle. Flowers and

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gardening were the Rector's pet hobbies, and he soon imparted his favourite tastes to his great-nephew. Alexis knew more about flowers than many grown-up people; he had no playfellows of his own age, and made the flowers his companions; he would lean over the flowers and whisper to them. He knew the quaint old-fashioned names cottagers give them; and the Rector had not only taught him their botanical structure, but told him the old legends and customs which in course of many ages have grown up round the plants.

And now the old Rector was dead. Alexis had to go away to another home, among relations he had never seen. Yet

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oddly enough, he thought less of his cousins, and of his grandfather, than of their home; and the question that he constantly asked himself was—

"I wonder if they have a nice garden."

His uncle, with whom he was to travel, now called him; cutting short the good-byes to the garden. It was time to go, the carriage was waiting: in a few moments the Rectory had quite disappeared, and Alexis was fairly started upon his journey to the other side of England.

A very tired little boy he was before he arrived at his grandfather's house. There had been a long drive, a long railway journey, and then another long drive; and

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by the time the house was reached Alexis stumbled out of the carriage almost too tired to stand. Outside it was, of course, quite dark, but there were lights at the door, and a soft delicious scent made the child look round him. He was standing in a conservatory quite full of beautiful flowers. Their sweet scent filled the whole house, it stole into Alexis's little bedroom, and was the last thing he thought of before he fell asleep.

Alexis found out, the next morning, that he was likely to be as solitary in his new home as in the old one. His three eldest cousins, Mary, Philip, and Gertrude, were grown up, or at any rate considered them-

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selves to be so ; in the nursery there were several little ones, hardly more than babies. The flowers, who are never old, never young, would still be Alexis's playmates after all.

He found his way, as soon as possible, into the conservatory ; the winter sunshine fell upon the floor, filtered through the leaves of a beautiful red Passion Flower that grew over the roof; an Orange tree, and some Camellias were trained against the wall ; while, tier upon tier, stood pots of Azaleas, Chinese Primrose, Cyclamens, Tuberoses, and that sweet yellow Citisus, which fills every place with its subtle scent. At the very end of the green-house an archway filled with palms and ferns shel-

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tered a little fountain, where the water trickled over stones, lapped against the moss-like Selaginella that crept over the basin, and where gold and silver fish flashed to and fro.

"The green-house flowers are very nice," said Alexis aloud to himself, "but, after all, I don't like them so much as those in the garden at home. These are strangers; I don't even know their names."

He had loitered in the conservatory for about a quarter of an hour, and this was the conclusion he had come to.

"I should have thought our names might have been known for the asking," said a voice.

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It was the Camellia who spoke, and the Cyclamen added—

"Especially as the head gardener always puts a label in every pot."

"I wonder what your name is, you beautiful sweet thing," said Alexis, pulling the label out of a pot of Tuberoses. "*Polianthes Tuberosa*," he added, reading it aloud; "that's a stupid name enough."

"But the Malays call me 'Mistress of the Night,'" replied the Tuberose; "and when a Malay lady puts me in her hair, she intends her lover to understand that his suit pleases her. When first we came to Europe, a Dutch florist cultivated us with double flowers. This so delighted

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him that, when he had as many roots as he could grow, he burnt the rest, in order to remain the only European who grew such flowers. You have called me sweet, Alexis ; the poet Shelley said I was—

'The sweetest flower for scent that grows.'"

"Too strong, say some people," remarked the Camellia in languid tones, thereby attracting Alexis's attention. He looked for a few moments at her still waxlike beauty, and then said—

"You are lovely ; it is a pity you are so stiff and scentless."

"'We boast no fragrance, and conceal no thorn,'"

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quoted the Camellia. "Camellus, or Kamel; a Jesuit missionary, travelling in Asia, brought the first of us home to Queen Maria Theresa in a mother-o'-pearl vase. The gardeners clip us down and train us, but let us grow of our own free will, and see how luxuriant our branches become, laden with clusters of pink and white flowers —the Roses of Japan!"

"I know you," cried Alexis, laughing at the Cyclamens. "We had the little wild English Cyclamens growing upon the rockery at home, and the old women called them Sow-bread, and Swine-bread."

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"Because when we grow thickly the pigs feed upon us," replied the Cyclamen good-naturedly. "Put us in your room at night, Alexis; we will guard you while you sleep.

'St. John's wort and fresh Cyclamen, he in his chamber kept,
From the powers of evil angels to guard him while he slept.'

Have you heard of 'Bleeding Nun,' as another name for our wild cousin? We are dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and used as a charm against bad weather. Cyclamen means a coronal; and so the Greeks called us because they wove us into wreaths."

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Alexis hardly listened; his whole attention was absorbed by a tall white Lily flower, whose many blossoms were circled round a long green stalk. A beautiful flower, like a saint among flowers; tenderly fragrant, drooping to hide that each blossom held a crown.

"I am the Eucharis," it answered, when Alexis asked its name. "The missionary explorers in South America found me upon the banks of the river Amazon; and they called me *Eucharis Amazonica*, for they said that so lovely a flower filled men's hearts with thanksgiving. Moreover they dedicated me to that most sacred mystery the Holy Eucharist."

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"Those early explorers went into the new countries with their hearts full of sacred things," said the red Passion-flower. "The Spaniards, when first they saw the Passion-flower in the Mexican forests, thought that so marvellous a blossom betokened that the Indians should be converted to Christianity."

"I know, I know," cried Alexis. "My uncle often showed me the sacred signs in the blue Passion-flower at home. There is the crown of thorns, in the rays round the blossom; the three styles are the three nails, and the pistil the pillar of scourging, with the sponge at the top. The dark marks upon the rays

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are the thirty pieces of silver; indeed there is hardly any emblem of the Passion that cannot be seen in the Passion-flower."

Cousin Mary calling him, now obliged Alexis to leave the conservatory, not, however, before the Cyclamen had said—

"You see we green-house flowers are not so very dull after all."

"Come again, dear Alexis," cried the Azalea; "we can tell you stories of strange countries, of beautiful rivers, and wild forests. We are travellers, we have come from far, and our introduction into your country is one long volume of adventures. Our names commemorate the

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brave men who brought us home with them, to show those left behind what the New World was like. Ours are the homes where the sun ever shines, and the skies are ever blue."

"The sun is shining and the sky is blue here now," laughed Alexis, who was too thoroughly an English boy to care about the frost. And he ran out of the conservatory to go and help Mary gather Christmas Roses for the drawing-room vases.

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WINTER AND THE FLOWERS.

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CHAPTER II.

WINTER AND THE FLOWERS.

A BITTERLY cold day. "January freeze the pot upon the fire," Nurse called it. She was busy, and sent Alexis out into the garden to play alone. He was to run up and down the paths, and keep himself warm, and "not to go into those

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nasty, stuffy hot-houses," were her injunctions. Alexis scrupulously obeyed her, though hardly amusing himself by so doing.

It was so cold. He tried racing up and down the paths, and found it very dull, and the flower beds had no sign of life in them.

"Nasty cold winter, that kills the flowers, I hate him," said Alexis.

"What are you saying about me?" inquired a man who had been busy over the borders. Alexis had thought him one of the gardeners, but, now that he turned round, recognized Winter himself. No one could help knowing him; a tall, thin old man, in a long brown coat, with

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a cowl drawn over his head, and a white beard. Over his shoulders he carried a sack, and in his hand what looked like a weeding spud.

"I don't kill the flowers," he said, rather pettishly. "I'm always telling them to keep out of the way of my brother, Jack Frost, and when they wont do so I'm blamed for it. Besides, I've flowers of my own; haven't you heard of Winter Cherries, Winter Greens, and Winter Daisies, as Somersetshire people call Chrysanthemums?"

"Yes," replied Alexis, "but they really come in Autumn."

"Well, come and look at the Christmas

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Roses," said Winter, "they're mine; nobody can deny it; some people call them Winter Roses, too."

A long row of Christmas Roses wa blossoming under a sheltering wall. Pink, spotted, and those pure white transparent blossoms, which every one associates with Christmas time.

"They are the best of all," said Alexis.

"They were the first of all," replied Winter. "When the three Holy Kings, the Magi, came from the East to Bethlehem and offered at the Christ-Child's feet their gold, frankincense, and myrrh, a little shepherd girl stood without, weeping. She, too, loved the Christ-Child, but

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she had nothing to offer Him, not even a flower, for the ground was frozen hard. Suddenly she saw beside her a beautiful Angel, who bid her dry her tears, touched the hard ground, from which there immediately sprang up Christmas Roses, offerings as fit for His shrine as the riches of the Magi.

"'Though thou art poor and hast no gold to bring,
Though ice-bound earth no Heaven-sent flower bestows,
Yet give thy heart this Noël to thy King;
This is the lesson of the Christmas Rose.'

They used to use Hellebore for incantations," continued Winter, "and to this day the peasants in Tuscany augur the future

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harvest from it. If it comes up with four tufts, the harvest will be good; if three, very fair; if two, bad."

Close to the Christmas Roses a Violet, taking advantage of the sheltered corner, was blossoming.

"I think the Violets are my flowers, now," said Winter.

"You have stolen them from Spring; once they were March Violets," laughed Alexis. "They were *La fleur qui fait le printemps;* but now they blossom in September and until Easter."

"Violets blossoming too profusely in the autumn portend an epidemic the next year," said Winter, gravely. "The Vene-

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tians say that 'St. Sebastian (whose feast is the 20th of January) comes with the Violet in his hand;' Violet or no Violet, we are quit of winter."

"In Venice perhaps, not in England," said Alexis. "I think there are more stories about Violets than almost any other flower," he added.

He was remembering how his great-uncle had told him about Ianthe, the favourite nymph of Artemis, who, to defend her from the attentions of Apollo, dyed her favourite blue. The loss of her beauty, however, grieved Ianthe so much that she pined away, and the goddess changed her into a Violet.

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"Some people say that Zeus made the Violet spring up as food for Io, when Hera, out of jealousy, had changed her into a cow," Winter told him. "They formed the couch of Zeus and Hera in Olympus; and carpeted the bower of Adam and Eve in Eden. Another story, told by Herrick, says that Violets were always white until Venus—

"'On a day, wise poets tell,
Some time in wrangling spent,
Whether the Violets should excel,
Or she, in sweetest scent.

But Venus, having lost the day,
Poor girls she fell on you,
And beat you so, as some dare say,
Her blows did make you blue.'

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White Violets are the emblems of hapless lovers, as the Blue Violet signifies constancy. Do you know the story of the floral games at Toulouse?"

Alexis did not, so Winter told him. How Cleménce loved Lantrec the troubadour, and her angry father shut her up in a tower, whence the only token she could send her lover was a Violet to signify her faithful love. For her sake Lantrec fought on her father's side in the defence of Toulouse, and was killed in battle. When the news of his death was brought to Cleménce she died of sorrow; and in memory of these two faithful lovers the floral games of Toulouse were

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instituted, when the Troubadours contend with verses for the prize of a golden Violet.

"People speak of the modest Violet," Winter pursued, rather impatiently; "but it is one of the most celebrated of flowers. The Greeks loved it; they thought that for a woman to have 'violet lids' to her eyes was a great beauty, and hence Shakespeare's lines—

> "'Violets dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
> Or Cytherea's breath.'

Violets were the badge of Athens; 'Athens the Violet crowned,' as its orators called it. Then Mahomet declared that El Islam excelled all religions as the Violet excelled

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all flowers. Centuries later, and Violets were the badge of the great Napoleon. His friends called him Caporal Violette; during his exile in Elba the pass-word of his party was '*Aimez vous la Violette?*' The reply of those in the secret, '*Elle revient au printemps.*' But the Bourbons, when in the ascendant said, '*La saison des Violettes se passe.*' And Mademoiselle Mars, the actress, was hissed off the stage for wearing them in her dress. Quite lately the Violet once more reappears as a royal flower, the favourite of Frederick the Noble. Truly did Wordsworth say—

"'Long as there are Violets
They shall have their place in story.'"

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He and Alexis had walked along while talking; Winter was too chilly a companion for Alexis to care to stand still beside him. They had come to the bottom of the bank that divided the garden from the orchard, upon the top of which a Furze-bush was displaying some yellow blossoms.

"When Furze is out of bloom, kissing is out of fashion," remarked Alexis, drawing Winter's attention to the flower.

"You would hardly believe that further north the Furze will scarcely grow at all," said Winter. "They try to cultivate it in green-houses, and even then can hardly keep it alive. There is a story told of

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Linnæus, before he was a great botanist, working as a gardener's boy, but even then knowing more than his master. A plant had been given to the Swedish gardener, that he could not with any coaxing get to grow. Charles Linné (for that was his real name) begged to try what he could do with it, took the little starveling from the hot-beds and glass frames, and put it out in the open air in a sheltered corner, where the Mountain Gorse might grow. It is also said that when he came to England and saw the Furze (or Gorse) in blossom upon the moors, he knelt down and thanked God for its great beauty."

Winter now interested Alexis immensely

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by turning over the earth with his spud. He was looking down keenly, and presently, laying his hand on the child's shoulder (making him shiver all over), said, "Look, look, there they are, my little beauties, Winter's own flowers."

They were the Winter Aconites, peeping up from under the soil, each little blossom with a green ruff round its yellow neck, like Elizabethan pages making a bow. Close to them some Snowdrop leaves were showing themselves above ground, reminding Alexis of a little poem his great-uncle used to quote :—

"Silver and gold! The Snowdrop white
And yellow-blossomed Aconite

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Waking from Winter's slumber cold,
Their hoarded treasures now unfold,
And scatter them from left to right.
Ah, with how much more rare delight
Upon my sense their colours smite
Than if my fingers were to hold
Silver and gold.

"They bear the superscription bright
Of the great King of love and might,
Who stamped such beauty there of old
That men might learn as ages rolled
To trust in God, nor worship quite
Silver and gold."

"I cannot let them come up yet," Winter said, "or my brother Jack Frost will nip them. Run in, Alexis, I am going to put all my flowers to bed under a nice white quilt."

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He put his hand in the sack as he spoke, and shook out two or three snow-flakes, one of which fell and melted on Alexis' nose. The boy laughed, nodded to Winter, and ran into the house. He came back just in time, nurse told him, it was beginning to snow fast.

"The old woman is plucking her geese," said she.

But Alexis knew better; Winter was shaking the flakes out of his big sack.

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SNOWDROPS AND CROCUSES—
A SPRING CHAT.

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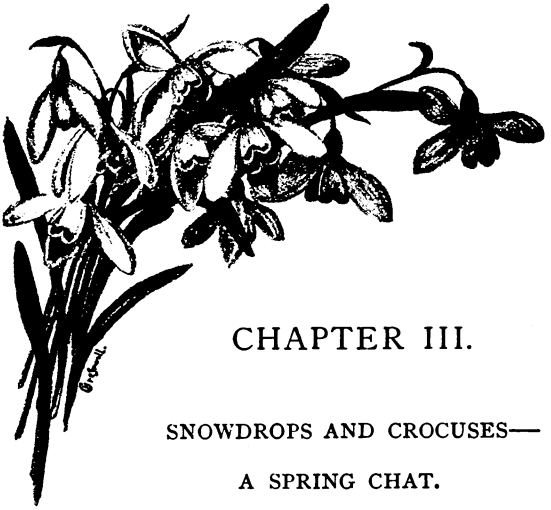

CHAPTER III.

SNOWDROPS AND CROCUSES—

A SPRING CHAT.

It had been a long, cold winter, particularly long to poor Philip, the eldest of Alexis' cousins; for he had slipped on the ice early in the season, and slightly strained his back, so that he had to lie still: all the fun of the winter and the

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possibility of returning to college after the vacation alike impossible for him. Gladly he welcomed the first suggestion of warm weather, when the sofa could be drawn up to the window, where the sunshine fell through the curtains, and where he could look across the lawn. The children were playing in the garden; but presently Alexis ran up to the window, a few Snowdrops and Crocuses in his hand, which he laid on the table by the couch.

"Here are some flowers for you, Phil, the first I have gathered," he said, running off again to the others without awaiting his cousin's thanks.

"What a funny little chap Alexis is,"

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remarked Philip, "and how he dotes on flowers."

"He always likes to hear about them," said Mary. "And remembers both Botany and Folk-lore," added Gertrude.

"They really are very interesting," said Philip. "Look at this Crocus, the classic Crocus that sprang up round the couch of Zeus and Hera in Olympus."

"Do you remember," pursued Gertrude, "that when the three goddesses came to the judgment of Paris, 'at their feet the Crocus brake like fire'?"

"Milton, who copies all the classic writers, tells us that in the bower of Adam and Eve—

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"'Under foot the Violet,
Crocus, and Hyacinth, with rich inlay
'Broidered the ground;'"

so Philip told them; and Gertrude promptly answered—

"That leads one farther, from the earthly to the heavenly Paradise, where Dr. Faustus, in his vision, saw—

"'The yellow Crocus glimmer
Like a flame amid the grass.'"

"May we not, speaking of Crocuses, include Saffron;" said Mary, "it at once opens such a wide field of Lore?"

"You are thinking of the old Rajahs of India, who, when they saw nothing before them but disaster, put on saffron robes,

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and with all their wives ascended the funeral pyre, preferring death to defeat," said Philip.

"Is not the Saffron robe the garment of sacrifice?" suggested Mary. "Think of Iphigenia at the altar, 'Her robe of Crocus-dipping flowing to the ground.'"

"I prefer to think of Saffron as Shakespear uses it, 'to colour a Warden-pie,'" laughed Philip. "By the way, it is only when seriously considering the reason of things that one realizes that the town of Saffron-Walden was so called from the crops of Saffron Crocus grown there."

"Come, order, order!" cried Gertrude. "We have wandered far away from the

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youth Crocus, who died for love of the Shepherdess Smilax.

"'Crocus and Smilax, once a happy pair,
But now transformed, delightful blossoms bear.'"

"And we are entirely neglecting the Snowdrop," Philip added, taking up the little flower. "I'm afraid Alexis is superstitious, he has taken such care to bring a number, not only one or two Snowdrops into the house."

"One would signify a death, I heard nurse telling him so the other day," replied Mary.

"There is no classic lore here, merely an English wild flower," said Gertrude.

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"Is it an English wild flower?" demanded Philip.

"I know that botanists have questioned it," Gertrude replied, "but surely those on the hedge down the lane, and the great bank of them in the churchyard make them sufficiently wild for us."

"And if they are not rich in classic fancy, they can boast a wreath of rustic purity and simplicity. Wordsworth and Keble knew their value and beauty; the flower of purity—

"'To Virgins sacred and the Snowdrop styled.'"

"Ah, it is dedicated to the Virgin of Virgins," said Gertrude, "it is the flower of the Purification—

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"'The Snowdrop in purest white arraie
First rears her head on Candlemas Day.'

On that day the image of Our Lady used to be taken out of the churches and Snowdrops put in its place, thus they are called 'Fair Maids of February.'"

"The French '*Perce-neige*' is pretty and very suggestive," remarked Mary; "and I like the Welsh '*Clockmaban*,' Baby Bells. Then the German is '*Schnee-Glocken*,' which brings us back to the Snowdrop, that some etymologists have suggested to be an ear-drop or earring of snow."

"I can only find two legends about the flower, and those I fancy are modern inventions, still, they are very pretty," said

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Gertrude, who had been turning over the pages of a book. "Hope was weeping over the death of nature in the cold winter time, and where her tears fell they melted the snow, and Snowdrops sprang up; henceforth they have been the flowers of Hope. Another story tells us that Eve was mourning after the barren earth, when she had been driven from Paradise. The snow was fast falling and an Angel came to comfort her. He took the snowflakes, breathed upon them, and they fell to earth lovely flowers, more to be valued even than the blossoms of Eden; for, said the Angel—

"'This is an earnest Eve to thee
That sun and summer soon shall be.'

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"I only wish that this 'firstling of the year's delight' did not disappear so quickly. Snowdrops seem unwilling to linger lest they should not be wanted. Engrossed by the multitude of blossoms that follow her, we forget the Snowdrop, till suddenly we realize that the bed is all leaves and seeds."

"We are most horribly ungrateful to the spring flowers," answered Gertrude, "welcoming them so warmly, forgetting them so soon. But it is nearly lunch time; I must put away this appalling library of books and dictionaries; what shall we do with our knowledge now we have acquired it?"

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"I mean to write it down and give it to Alexis," replied Philip, "that he may see we have appreciated his offering of Snowdrops and Crocuses."

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SPRING FLOWERS AT MOTHER HOLDA'S PALACE.

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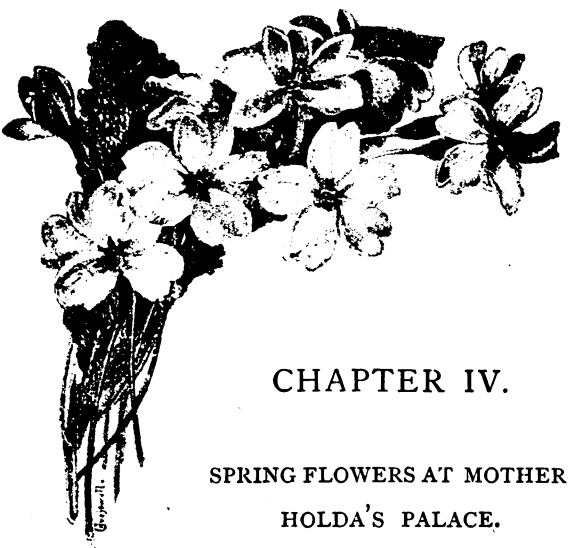

CHAPTER IV.

SPRING FLOWERS AT MOTHER HOLDA'S PALACE.

IT was the Primroses that did it. They enticed Alexis down the lane gathering first one, then another; then seeing two, yet finer, further on—and so on, until he really did not know where he was. No

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wonder, if this is the way Primroses lead children astray, that Breton mothers say, "Hedge Primroses give fevers to little children," to prevent them from wandering down the lanes during the uncertain days of spring. Alexis, too, felt so happy; he had gathered a blossom with six petals, that is a "true love," and very lucky. And he wondered why Shakespeare had spoken of,

> "Pale Primroses
> That die unmarried ere they can behold
> Bright Phebus in his strength."

And Milton of the "Rathe (early) Primroses that forsaken dies"; until the Primroses themselves told him that they once had been Paralisos, the son of Priappus

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and Flora, who loved the nymph Melicerta. But she proved faithless to him, so that he died forsaken and his parents changed him into the pale yellow flower.

And still Alexis went down the lane, gathering Primroses until he reached what seemed like a little door. It was fastened, but the Primroses could open it for him; they are the *Schlüsselblume*, the key-flowers, who can open the door of that mysterious palace belonging to Mother Holda, whom some people call Berchta, and we know as Dame Nature. So the door opened and Alexis entered. To his great surprise he found himself in a ferny dell. Banks, shut in by trees, and threaded by tiny paths,

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rose on either side. The undergrowth was of hazel bushes fringed with Catkins; the ground was covered with green plants. And at the top of the dell on the stump of a tree, sat a girl dressed in green. A wreath of Periwinkles crowned her yellow hair, and in her hands she held a long staff made of a Willow branch, studded with sweet yellow palms. From under the log upon which she sat a stream flowed, dancing and rippling through the dell.

"How do you do, Alexis?" she said. "Did the Primroses bring you here?"

"I think they did," replied the boy. "Where is this?"

"This is Mother Holda's palace, and I

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am Spring. Come and rest; you look very tired; I have come to call my flowers, and am very late: the lazy things have been asleep all this time."

"That must be your fault," said Alexis, mischievously.

"I'm afraid it is," she answered, sorrowfully. "Mother Nature gave me a dreadful scolding yesterday." And the tears rising in her eyes, half laughing, half crying, she looked like April.

Now came a sound like the blowing of horns, and with a rush, nodding and swaying, came the Daffodils, reminding Alexis that—

"The Daffodil his trumpet blows,
And after Spring a-hunting goes."

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Merry jolly fellows they were, throwing themselves around Spring, and encircling her, while she clasped them, crying—

"Welcome, welcome, my

"'bold Daffodils,
That come before the Swallow dares and take
The winds of March with beauty.'"

"We are Lent Lilies, and just in time for Ash Wednesday, when they ought to decorate the churches with Lent Lilies and Yew," said the Daffodils.

"And Saint Peter's Leeks in Wales," quoth Alexis. "In France *Les Pauvres filles de Sainte Claire*, and perhaps, who knows, also the classic Asphodel."

"Now the children will be able to say—

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"'Daffadowndilly has come to town
In a petticoat of yellow,
And an upper skirt of brown,'"

said Spring.

"But I have heard," answered Alexis, "that—

"'Daffadowndilly did grow by a well,
But who were her parents, no one can tell.'"

"That is because Pluto made us come up to entice away Persephone," replied the Flowers.

"The Daffodils were fair to see,
They nodded lightly on the lea."

And Persephone wandered away from her handmaidens to gather them. When

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her lap was full, Pluto sprang up through the earth with his chariot and black horses. He snatched away Persephone. No one knew where she was, and the Daffodils that "frighted she let fall" were the only trace of her that remained.

"Who comes here?" asked Spring. "Oh, the Lady Smocks, the Milkmaids of the Devonshire meadows, come to tell us that 'Mother's gone-a-milking,' as Middlesex children say. Of course they follow the Daffodils, for—

> "'Daffodils the field adorn,
> With Lady Smocks on Our Lady's Morn.'"

"I thought," said Alexis—

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" ' Daisies pied, and Violets blue,
And Lady Smocks all silver white,
And Cuckoo-buds of yellow hue,
Do paint the meadows with delight.' "

Spring hardly heard him; she was cuddling the Daisies, those flowers of Innocence and of children. The little "wee, modest, pink-tipped flowers" were in her arms.

"My little darlings, I must have twelve of you," she said, "for no one will believe that Spring has come till they can count twelve Daisies."

"Or put their foot upon twelve, some people say," remarked Alexis.

"Ah, those who tread upon the Daisies

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in the spring, will have Daisies growing over their graves before the end of the year," Spring answered. "No one shall tread upon my little darlings, they shall dance upon the hills, 'Trembling Stars,' as the Welsh call them. So in bygone days pretty Bellis danced with her rustic lover Epigeus, until Vertumnus, the God of Orchards, envied him her love, and would have carried her away. But Bellis vanished from the sight both of lover and ravisher, changed into a Daisy, the 'flower of flowers.'"

"Chaucer said that Queen Alcestis was changed into a Daisy, and had as many virtues as the flower had rays," said Alexis.

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"A better queen than Alcestis claims her: Saint Margaret of Scotland, 'Maid Margaret that was so meek and mild.' And good St. Louis of France, starting for the Crusades, had a ring engraved with a crucifix, a Lily, and a Daisy, to remind him of his religion, his country, and Margaret his wife."

Then Alexis reminded Spring that proud, unhappy Margaret of Anjou had loved the Daisies, for her courtiers wore them in her honour; and Margaret, Countess of Richmond, mother of Henry VII., carried three Daisies on a green turf on her coat-of-arms. In the tournament, too, they played their part, for when Philip the Bold of

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Burgundy was about to marry Margaret of Flanders, he instituted an order of the Daisy. And the Daisies, whom the Scotch call Gowans, and "Bairns flowers," hearing of all their honours, blushed till their tips were pinker than ever.

Next arrived the "Cowslips wan that hang the pensive head," looking very melancholy, until Spring bade them cheer up, and remember that they were the Fairy Queen's pensioners, and that the spots in their gold coats were—

"Rubies, fairy favours,
In these freckles live their savours."

Besides this, Titania had ordered one of

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her fairies to hang a dewdrop pearl in every Cowslip's ear, as soon as they should come into blossom.

After them followed the Wood Anemones, very breathless, and blown hither and thither by the wind. They looked as if they did not like it, in spite of being called Wind-Flowers, and Alexis asked them if it were really true that they only blossom when the wind blows.

"Pliny said so," replied the Flowers. "We are really tear-drops, the tears Venus shed when looking for Adonis. She walked through the briers and thorns that tore her feet till they bled, and wept scalding tears that fell upon the ground.

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"'Anemones sprang from those bitter tears,
Each drop of blood a crimson rosebud bears.'"

"Have you ever heard the children call them 'Wooden-enemies'?" Alexis asked Spring.

She laughed; "That reminds me of another of my children," she answered, and the Stitchwort came when she called it.

"In bygone days people called this fellow 'All bones,'" she told Alexis. "No wonder Gerarde the herbalist remarked of the name, 'Whereof I see no reason, except it be by the figure of opposition, as when we say in English, "he is an honest

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fellow," meaning, "he is a knave." For this is a tender herb bearing no such bony substance.'"

"I have always called you Snap-jack, because your ripe seed pods snap," said Alexis.

"In Kent we are 'Snappers,' or Shirt-buttons. Some people call us Milk-pails; and near Plymouth they say we are 'Ladies-in-our-Nightgowns.'"

"Besides," whispered Spring, "they call him Devil's-eye, and Devil's-core in Salop; but that is rude, and the Snap-jack does not answer to it. Here is one of the most legendary of my flowers, Alexis, the Wood Sorrel, do you know it?"

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"As Alleluia flowers," replied the boy.

"And Cuckoo's Meat; 'either,' as Gerarde says, 'because the Cuckoo feedeth thereon, or because it comes when Alleluia is won't to be sung in our churches.' The French call it '*Alleluia pain de coucou.*'"

"And, prettier even than that, '*Le bon pain de notre Dieu.*'"

"In England you regard it as an Easter flower; but the Germans take bunches of it to church upon Trinity Sunday. Some people have said that Wood Sorrel, with its triple leaf, is the Shamrock by which Saint Patrick explained the doctrine of the Trinity to the Irish."

Next came the Lords and Ladies; dedi-

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cated, as Spring told Alexis, to Our Lord and Our Lady, and representing the Virgin and Child under a canopy. Parson-in-the-pulpit some people call it, and others Lamb-and-flag. But Alexis best liked to think of the blossom as the English Passion-flower, the long spike representing the column to which our Lord was bound, beneath which lies the scourge with its many cruel knotted ends; and upon the leaves are the dark marks of Christ's holy blood which fell upon the flower as it grew beneath the Cross.

If the story of the Lords and Ladies made him a little grave; the seriousness was dispelled by the next comers. Rolling

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in their gait like sailors, shouting and squeezing other flowers aside, came the Marsh Marigolds.

"You noisy fellows," cried Spring. "No wonder people speak of you as Crazy Betty!"

"Or 'Drunkards' as Devonshire folk say," said the Cowslips.

"We are Drunkards because we drink up so much water," replied the Marsh Marigolds, not one whit abashed.

"'Brave Marsh Mary-buds, rich and yellow,
Give me your money to hold,'"

asked Alexis.

"You shall have it and welcome," they re-

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plied; "we are flowers for raising the spirits; people used to wreathe us into garlands and hang them upon the cottage doors."

"I don't think people ever care to see you now, Marsh Marigold," said the Cowslip; "your blossoms always indicate such terribly swampy ground. Don't they call you Meadow-rout, Horse-blob, and Water-blob, besides 'Hobble-gobble,' for that is the sound made by mud when any one treads upon it, Water-dragon, and in French *Le souci d'eau?*"

Certainly the Cowslip was very rude, but the Marsh Marigold only laughed the louder.

"Yes, we are wild fellows," they replied,

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"but the Italians call us *Sposa del Sole*."

Alexis could now see that there were pink clouds in the sky behind the trees, and told Spring he must be going home. He did not know the time, but Spring gave him a Dandelion-clock which he blew —one—two—three—four—five. There would be just time to get home before tea. Nor did he forget his Primroses for which Spring commended him. Those who enter Mother Holda's palace, and forget on going out to take with them the yellow flowers that opened the door, are followed by a black dog, the emblem of selfishness and ingratitude for the rest of their days.

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Yet, though he gathered many more Primroses, and often walked down the same lane, Alexis could never for a second time find his way into that Fairy Dell.

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A MAY WALK ROUND THE GARDEN.

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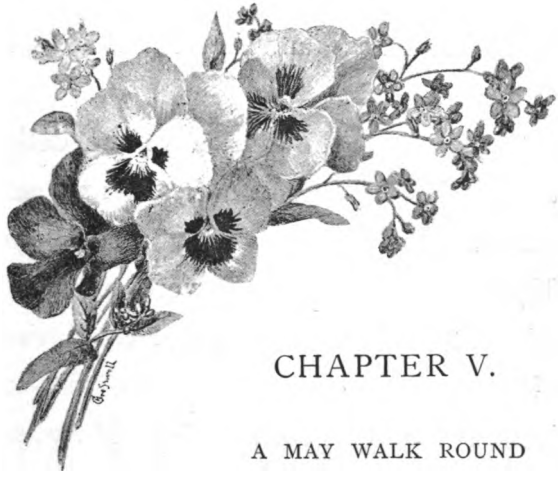

CHAPTER V.

A MAY WALK ROUND THE GARDEN.

MARY had called Alexis to come and help her gather flowers for the vases. She was standing in the conservatory waiting for him, in a large hat, carrying a pair of scissors and a basket. She gave the

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basket to Alexis, and the cousins went out into the sunshine.

The beds on the lawn were the delight of the head gardener's heart, and small wonder; for the Pansies, Forget-me-nots, Hyacinths, and Tulips were perfection. Alexis thought the Tulips, of which every blossom was spread open to the sun, looked like gorgeous birds; Mary said that they always reminded her of the stout Dutch burghers, who, in the middle of the seventeenth century, suffered from what has been known ever since as the Tulipo-mania, when immense sums of money, and even houses and land, were paid for a single bulb; and a sailor who

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ate some roots, thinking they were onions, is said to have cost the kind host who gave him breakfast several thousand pounds. "But they were favourite Turkish flowers long before the Dutch patronized them," added Mary; "there used to be a Tulip feast held annually in the Sultan's seraglio, and the name Tulip is said to be derived from a Persian word signifying a turban."

"They are not unlike the gorgeous turbans we read of in the Arabian Nights," Alexis said, eyeing the flowers critically. "Mary, can you find the '*ai ai*' of Hyacinthus written upon the Hyacinth petals?"

He was alluding to the classic story, Mary knew well enough—of the gentle

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Hyacinth, the friend and companion of Apollo. Of this friendship Zephyr, the West Wind, was jealous; and while Hyacinth was playing at quoits with the god, Zephyr contrived that one of Apollo's quoits should fly crookedly, and striking Hyacinth on the head, kill him. Poor Hyacinth sank down sighing "*ai ai*" (alas! alas!); but even Apollo could not restore him to life. All that he could do for his friend was to change the dead body into a flower, ever since known by his name, with the letters "*ai ai*" marked upon its petals.

"I know," Alexis went on, "that the wild Bluebells—Cuckoo's-boots, as some

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of our cottagers called them—are not marked, because they were named Hyacinthus non-scriptus for that reason. But I have never found it upon the real Hyacinth petals."

"The gardeners have cultivated it away, I expect," said Mary, with a laugh. "Here is another classic flower for you, Alexis." And she dropped some Narcissus stems into the basket as she spoke.

"I don't like Narcissus," replied the boy. "I think he was lazy, selfish, and conceited—to sit by a stream looking all day long at the reflection of his own face. And when he fell in and was drowned it served him right: he was not worth pining

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away and dying for, as poor Echo did for him."

> " Narcissi, the fairest of them all,
> Who gaze at their flowers in the stream's recess,
> Till they die in their own dear loveliness,"

quoted Mary; and she jestingly asked whether Alexis preferred calling the flower Butter and Eggs, Poached Eggs, or, like the double ones, Pretty Nancies; that he might not remember the classic story of Narcissus and Echo?

" I think you might give me a nosegay, Mary," said the boy, as they strolled down the paths, filling the basket at bush and border.

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"Very well, only you must earn it; a story for every flower."

"The garden is full of stories," answered Alexis, looking round him.

"Begin, then." And she mischievously gathered a bit of London Pride.

"That's an Irish Saxifrage; they call it Saint Patrick's Cabbage, there. I have heard people name it Queen Anne's Needlework, because of the little pattern embroidered on the petals, and None-so-pretty."

"You have learnt that!" said Mary, who, in truth, had thought that the boy would have nothing to say about it. She promised him something more interesting

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next time, and began picking Lilies of the Valley.

There was no fear that Alexis would not have plenty to tell her about the lovely "Ladders to Heaven," as he liked to call them. Mary reminded him that they are Virgin's Tears and May Lilies. Then Alexis remembered the story he had once heard about Saint Leonard, who encountered a mighty worm (perhaps a snake or dragon) in a forest. For three days the Saint and the monster fought, until at last the worm was driven away; but wherever in the fury of the battle Saint Leonard's blood was shed there came up Lilies of the Valley.

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Now they came to a Broom bush, planted in a corner by the shrubbery, and all bright with yellow blossoms. But as Mary put out her hands to cut some, Alexis held her arm.

"Don't, oh don't gather the Broom in May!" he cried; "it's so unlucky."

"You superstitious child, what happens?" she said.

"If you sweep the house with blossomed Broom in May,
You sweep the head of the house away,"

Alexis told her.

"But I have no intention of sweeping," objected Mary.

"Still—

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" 'If you pluck the Bloom in May,
Every good housekeeper rues the day;'

for there will be such a drought all the summer," said her cousin.

"Then I suppose I must forbear. I had no idea that Broom was anything but a royal flower—the Plantagenista that Geoffry, Earl of Anjou, took as his badge, either on account of his humble descent from the workman Torquatus, or else because the Broom was firmly fixed in the rock under which he was passing, and Geoffry gathered it, exclaiming: "This golden flower shall be my cognizance; firmly rooted among the rocks, yet upholding that which is ready to fall!"

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"So the Plantagenets wore it in their helmets and put it upon their shields," chimed in Alexis. "Even on the Great Seal of England it appeared, for Richard Cœur de Lion had a sprig of Broom on either side of the throne on the seal. Only I do so hate our modern Botany books, which have taken away *Planta Genista* as its Latin name, and put *Cytisus Scoparius* instead. *That* suggests nothing to our mind, while a whole volume of romance and history hang round *Plantagenista.*"

"Like many another modern improvement—not half so wise as the old ways," replied Mary. "But we cannot help them,

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Alexis. We are only poor Folk-lore mongers, at whom men of Science laugh, when they see us looking for the Dove in the Columbine."

She cut some of the flowers as she spoke, and a flight of the Dove-shaped petals fluttered from a faded flower.

"Fair Columbines that drew the Car
Of Venus from her distant star,"

said Alexis, picking them up.

"We call them Doves, but the Latin, and foreign names suggest Aquilegia, the Eagle," replied Mary.

"Yet in bygone days the churches

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were decorated with them at Whitsuntide," said Alexis.

"In England it is the flower of forsaken lovers," Mary added.

"'The Columbine by lonely wanderers taken,
Is there ascribed to such as are forsaken.'

But in Italy, on the contrary, the flower is called *Perfetto Amore*."

"Now we must have some Monk's-hood, the Columbine's wicked cousin," said Alexis.

"Why wicked?" Mary asked.

"Is it not the Aconitum, the Wolf-bane, which sprang from the foam of Cerberus when Heracles dragged him from Hades?

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See what a cruel looking flower it is; the Germans call it *Teufels Wurz*; in Norway it is *Thors-hat*. Some say that Odin's cap of darkness, in which he walked invisible, was the Monk's-hood; or it is the helmet of the god Tyr."

"You shall keep it in your own nose-gay, for I will have none of it," said Mary. "I am going to gather Forget-me-nots."

But over the Forget-me-nots the cousins had quite an amicable rivalry as to which should tell most stories. First, there was the tale of the knight and lady strolling on the bank of a stream, by which grew a little blue flower.

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The lady asked for some, and the knight, bending over to get it, was overbalanced by his heavy armour. He fell into the deep water and was drowned, first throwing the flowers on shore, and crying out "Forget-me-not."

It was the last flower coloured at the Creation, and so afraid of being overlooked that it cried to God "Forget-me-not"; and its Maker bid the flower for ever retain the name, to remind it that once it had doubted Him.

An Angel, says a Persian poet, once loved a mortal maiden. They were expelled from Paradise until they had sown Forget-me-nots over the whole earth.

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Their task done they passed through the gates, and dwelt happily ever after.

Mary told Alexis how she had walked over the battle-field at Waterloo, and there gathered Forget-me-nots among the young corn. Forget-me-nots that are said never to have grown there until they sprang from the seed of a little plant carried next the heart of a young Englishman, who was killed in the battle.

Not too insignificant to take its place in heraldry, Henry VII. when in exile had a collar made, embroidered with Forget-me-nots and the motto "*Souvenez vous de moy*," suggesting to his friends that they would hear of him again.

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"But of all heraldic flowers here are the Irises," cried Mary; "the flowers over which doctors have disagreed from time immemorial."

"Don't let us discuss their disagreements," Alexis replied, laughing. "Let us believe that the arms of France, originally three toads, were found one morning by Clovis miraculously changed into three *Fleur de lys.* Thenceforth the Golden Lilies of France existed, the '*Gigli d'oro*' of Tasso. Often, too, in jest, the people were called Liliarts, and the kingdom Lilium."

"But Irises were not the royal flowers of France only; the white Florentine Iris

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was the white Lily of Florence; and ages ago they stood at the top of the sceptres of Babylonian kings," said Mary.

"The amount of learned discussion they have evoked makes one's brains whirl," answered the boy. "And now that we have skimmed the cream of them let us turn to something simpler—the Pansies.

"'There's Pansies, that's for thoughts.'

The line fits itself naturally to the flower; but the French *Pensée* is not half so pretty and quaint as the German *Stief-mutter blume*, the step-mother flower; and see, Mary, the grand-step-mother with her fine daughters, and the poor shabby little step-

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children, while in the middle is the poor father in his red night-cap."

"Do you like Shakespeare's story of Cupid flying to strike the 'fair vestal throned in the west,' and his dart falling upon

"'A little western flower
Before milk white, now purple with Love's wound,
And maidens call it "Love-in-idleness"'?"

"Those are the wild Heartsease of the fields," said Alexis.

"But they are the parents of all our garden ones. A little girl, Lady Mary Bennet, in 1810, amused herself in her own little garden, by seeing how many different colours and patterns of Hearts-

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ease she could grow. Her father's gardener was pleased with the idea, and helped her, and from their hybrids came all our pansies."

"They always keep to the three colours that have given them the name of Herb Trinity," Alexis thoughtfully remarked. "People called them Jupiter's-herb, too, because they were so gorgeous. I like 'Three-faces-under-one-hood'; besides which it has such quaint names, like 'Jump-up-and-kiss-me,' and 'Kitty-run-the-street.'"

"One flower more, then I must go in," said Mary. "How do you spell this, Alexis?"

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"'Double U, double O, double D E,
R O, double U, double F E,'"

replied Alexis, spelling out the old rhyme of "Woodrowffe," while Mary put the blossoms in the basket.

"They are more than half of them wild ones," said the boy, looking at their nosegay.

"All flowers are wild somewhere," answered Mary. "I like to think that our own old native wild flowers, loved and cultivated for many hundred years, still reign the favourites in our gardens."

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IN KING LAURIN'S ROSE-GARDEN.

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CHAPTER VI.

IN KING LAURIN'S ROSE-GARDEN.

"I AM so tired," sighed Alexis.

He had been running about all the hot Midsummer afternoon, picking up the tennis balls that fell outside the courts; and now threw himself idly upon the steps of the summer-house. This was built in a

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corner of the Rose garden; on three sides high trellises trained with Roses shut in a sheltered space; on the fourth side a Hawthorn hedge divided it from the orchard. Brambles made their way into this hedge, and some Dog-roses peeped over to look at their garden relations. Half-way down the hedge was a wicket gate leading to the orchard, with a pink May tree on one side, a white on the other arching over it, a few blossoms yet lingering on their branches.

A book lay close to Alexis' hand; it was called "Epics and Romances of the Middle Ages;" [1] he took it up and began reading

[1] Wagner and Mc'Dowal. Swan Sonnenschein and Co.

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about the wonderful Rose garden of the Dwarf King Laurin, lying far away in the wild German mountains. It was guarded by an iron door, inscribed with golden letters, and the Dwarf King punished cruelly those who destroyed his Roses.

Nevertheless Alexis thought he should very much like to go there.

Perhaps he uttered the wish aloud, for he heard a little voice saying close behind him—

"Shall I take you to my Rose-garden?"

Surely that quaint little brown man with the gold crown over his cowl could be no other than King Laurin himself. Alexis longed to go with him, yet felt a little frightened.

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"Promise you will not hurt me," he said.

"I only hurt bad people who injure my roses," replied the Dwarf; "not good children who love flowers."

He took Alexis by the hand, and in an instant they seemed to reach a lovely garden, full of Roses; everywhere Roses and nothing but Roses; and the best of it was that they could all talk.

"And," added King Laurin, "there are no flowers that have more stories to tell."

Only the worst of it was that they all wanted to talk at once! King Laurin had to silence them, and then Alexis, turning to a lovely White Rose, asked for her story.

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"Yes, I ought to begin," said the White Rose, "for white were the Roses when first created. There were no red ones until Venus went searching for Adonis, wandering barefoot among the thorns, which tore her tender feet, and the roses were dyed red with her blood. Some say that Cupid, dancing in Olympus, upset a bowl of wine, and it fell upon the earth staining the Roses red. Ever since that time Rose garlands have been worn at feasts, to wreathe the wine cups, and crown the thirsty revellers."

"The Rose forgets to tell you that once she was a damsel named Rhodanthe," said King Laurin; "She was wonderfully

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beautiful, so that her suitors declared that she was far lovelier than Artemis. They took her to the temple and put her upon the shrine of the goddess. This insult to his sister so much enraged Apollo that he smote Rhodanthe with his withering beams; instantly she was changed into a Rose bush, the crowd of impious worshippers shrivelled into thorns; and her lovers were changed into beetles, worms, and butterflies."

"That story is not true!" cried the Red Rose: "The Rose was never a vain impious maiden. Hear what Sappho the poetess says of us: 'If Zeus made a queen of the flowers, the Rose would reign over

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them. She is the ornament of the earth; the joy of the plants; the eye of the flowers; the blush of the meadow.' We are dedicated to Harpocrates, the God of Silence—"

("Would you believe it?" mischievously whispered King Laurin to Alexis.)

Disregarding the interruption the Rose continued: "The term 'under the Rose,' signifies secrecy. At Lullington Castle, in Kent, a Rose is carved with this motto around it,

"'Kentish true Blue, take this as a token,
Whatever is said here, under the Rose is spoken.'

Upon the Chapter-house at York is the motto,

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"'Ut Rosa flos florum,
Sic domus ista domorum.'

Some connection there has always been in men's minds between Red Roses and flames. Hence the story that Zoroaster when an infant was thrown upon the fire by the wicked King of Babylon. But the flames turned into roses, amongst which the child lay softly sleeping. A very similar Christian story is told by the old traveller, Sir John de Mandeville, about the field Floridus near Bethlehem. Here a Christian maiden was about to be burnt to death; she prayed God to deliver her, and he changed the faggots into Roses. Those already kindled into red ones, the

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others that had not caught fire into white; so that she stood, bound to the stake, sheltered by a bower of blossoms; and the place was called the 'Field that blossomed' from the event. Roses there are in Heaven, such as are never seen upon earth, and this Saint Dorothea knew; for as she was going to her martyrdom the young Præfect Theophilus entreated her to reconsider before she quitted this fair world with its beautiful flowers.

"'Theophilus,' replied she, 'I am going to a country where the flowers are far lovelier than any upon earth.'

"Then he begged her, jestingly, that if such were really the case she would, after

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reaching that land, send him some of the blossoms. This she promised to do, and then went steadfastly to her martyrdom. The crowd gathered to witness her death had not dispersed before they were astonished by the appearance of a lovely child, coming through their midst holding in his hand a bunch of magnificent roses, which he gave to Theophilus, saying—

"'Dorothea, who has just entered Paradise, sends you this;' and vanished.

"But the sight of the flowers impressed Theophilus so much that he then and there declared himself a Christian, and was presently martyred for the faith of Christ and Dorothea.

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"Good Saint Elizabeth of Hungary used daily to carry food to the Christians imprisoned by her harsh father. One day he met her carrying the food in the skirt of her dress, and demanded what she had there. 'Roses,' she replied. But he, disbelieving her, snatched at her gown; from which the food, miraculously changed to Roses, fell to the ground.

"Centuries later there lived in South America a pious and holy Indian girl; after whose death emissaries were sent to the Pope entreating that she might be canonized. 'An Indian saint!' cried he, 'it will sooner rain Roses.' But scarcely were the words uttered than a shower of

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Roses fell at his feet. And the maiden was canonized as Saint Rose of Lima."

"Now tell us something about historical Roses," demanded King Laurin; "we have had enough legendary lore to addle our brains; let us hear about the Red Roses of England."

"Edward I. originally adopted the Rose as his badge," the Red Rose replied; "but long before that the heathen Saxons carried a banner wrought with Roses into the battle-fields. After a victory prisoners were sacrificed under the Rose banner to their god Irminsul, a large wooden figure wreathed with roses."

"Pardon me interrupting you," inter-

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posed the White Rose, "but it is we, White Roses, who ought to be the Roses of England. For Pliny maintained that the Isle of Albion was so called *ob rosas albas quibus abundat.* We are the Roses of York, plucked by Richard Plantagenet in the Temple Garden, as you may read in Shakespeare. When those long wars were over, Perkin Warbeck was known as the 'White Rose of York.' Again we came into pre-eminence with James II., who, as Duke of York, carried the White Rose badge; and the white cockade of the Scottish Jacobites was none other than a representation of the White Rose. Even after all hope of the Stuarts regaining the

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throne was lost their adherents wore White Roses upon the 10th of June, 'for the sake of James the Rover.'"

"You see, she is an unlucky flower," said the Red Rose; "we, the Roses of Lancaster, have flourished and come to the ascendant, in spite of years of defeat. In Scott's 'Anne of Gierstein,' Margaret of Anjou is described sitting upon the battlements of a castle, the Red Rose of her party in her hair. Passionately she threw the blossom out into the storm, and the wind blew it back to her, as a token that after all the Lancastrian cause should prosper."

"My dears, don't quarrel over the old

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brawl now," gently interposed a York and Lancaster Rose. "Do not my striped petals show to this day the blending of the Roses? Near a monastery in Wiltshire, all through the war, there grew a tree upon which the Roses were both red and white. On the marriage of Henry Tudor with Elizabeth Plantagenet they became striped, and thus have remained ever since."

Now King Laurin took Alexis to where there grew a Moss Rose and a Maiden-blush. They also had their stories to tell. Very prettily, almost shyly the Moss Rose whispered how one night an ancestor of hers had sheltered an angel. He had

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been wandering all day upon earth doing good; a stormy night came on, when he could not fly back to Heaven. Men shut their doors against him, but the heart of the Rose opened and offered him shelter. In the morning he saw that she was so lovely nothing could add to her beauty. Nevertheless he bestowed upon her the soft mossy covering worn by Moss Roses to this day.

And the Maiden-blush had been a damsel loved by Apollo. She fled from him, yet he pursued her; at length overtaking her; then she changed herself into a Rose, still marked by the blush that tinged her face when the god kissed her.

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"My Rose-garden," said King Laurin, "grows not Roses only, but all the flowers that are akin to Roses. Here are the white Dog-roses, the 'Canker bloom" of the old poets, that 'live unwooed, and unrespected fade.'"

"But," said the Dog-roses, "once we were highly prized as curing the bite of a mad dog. Pliny tells us how the mother of a Roman soldier, who had been bitten, dreamt that a drink made of Dog-rose roots would cure him; he made use of it; recovered, contrary to expectation, and so did every one who afterwards made use of the remedy."

"Was not a Dog-rose bush, the 'thicket'

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in which Abraham found the ram caught by his horns?" asked King Laurin. The Dog-rose replied "yes," and then in lower tones added, "some say that we were the Crown of thorns."

"If so," answered the Dwarf King, "remember that for every thorn there was a rose—

"'Men saw the thorns on Jesus' brow
But angels saw the roses.'"

"I thought that the Crown of Thorns was made of Hawthorn," said Alexis.

"In memory of which the May-trees groan upon Good Friday," replied King Laurin. "But for that reason the French

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call it '*L'Epine noble*.' The French also say—

"'*Quand le buisson blanc entre en fleurs*
Crains toujours quelque fraicheurs,'

because May is such a cold month. But Hawthorn is not often in blossom upon the first of May now-a-days. Nor can it have been formerly; for in bygone times the dairymaid who could bring a bough in blossom upon the first of May, was rewarded by a bowl of cream. In some places it is thought unlucky to bring May into the house. It was in a Hawthorn bush that the crown of Richard III. fell upon Bosworth field, and was picked up and put upon the head of Henry VII.;

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thence arose the proverb 'cling to the crown though it hangs on a bush.'"

"Tell me," said Alexis, "is the story true about the Glastonbury Thorn?"

"The Thorn which grew out of the staff planted by Saint Joseph of Arimathea? Yes, there really is such a tree at Glastonbury; it is an Eastern plant, and blossoms at Christmas, as its natural time of flowering is in the winter.

"Another story we must not forget is that of the Pink Hawthorn which sheltered St. Meinrad, the French hermit. A pink May-tree grew outside his cell, and one day when he was asleep the soldiers were searching for him. From the May-tree

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to the cave door a spider spun a thick web, and the men who passed by thought that no one could have been near the place for days because the spider's web was unbroken."

Certainly King Laurin's Rose garden was a wonderful place; Alexis felt as if he could have stayed in it for ever. Though nothing grew there but Roses, the boy was quite amazed to see what numbers there were of Roses and plants akin to them. For here were the fruit trees, the Apples, Pears, Medlars, and Plums. Here the sweet Strawberries, and the Brambles laden with Blackberries. Being a fairy garden all the fruit blossomed and was ripe

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at the same time. The Meadow Sweet, or Queen of the Meadow, grew down by the streams; the little Lady's-mantle carpeted the ground; and here, too, was the Avens, or Herb Bennet, said to bring joy with it wherever it grows. Sloes were there; those bushes that are Sloes (or Winter-pick) in winter, and Blackthorn in spring, bringing, when they blossom, those cold March days that go by the name of "Blackthorn Winter." Scarcely a flower was there that had not some story or custom about itself to tell; far more than Alexis could remember.

"Take a bunch of flowers away with you," said King Laurin.

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" ' Gather ye roses while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying,
The flower so bright and fresh to-day
To-morrow may be dying.' "

So Alexis began gathering a great bunch of King Laurin's Roses; but the flowers seemed over-blossomed, they fell to pieces in his hand, the petals scattering all about him, and——

He was not in the Rose garden of King Laurin, but upon the steps of the summer-house, and all round him were scattered the petals of the cluster roses that had dropped from the trellis overhead.

He had been to King Laurin's Rose garden in his dreams.

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THROUGH MEADOW AND LANE;
ON LAKE AND MOOR.

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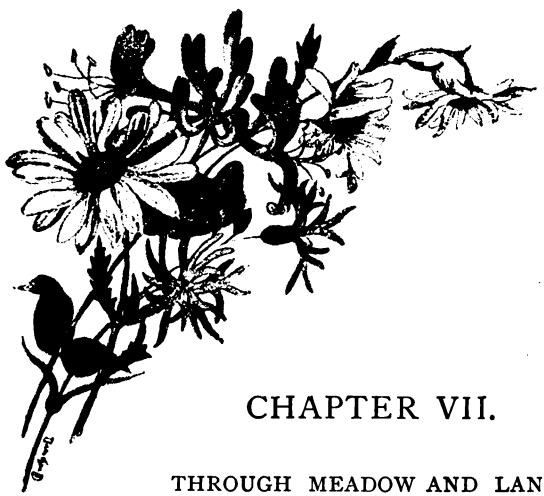

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH MEADOW AND LANE; ON LAKE AND MOOR.

GERTRUDE'S birthday, coming in the summer, was always the occasion of a whole holiday and a picnic; a merry family party to which only the children's very particular friends were invited to come. Every one

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was ready to start; Gertrude with the little cart and sturdy Shetland pony; her greatest friend, Blanche Austin, beside her; a younger sister, and (most important of all) the hampers of food. The other pony was saddled for the boys to ride and tie, and there were some squabbles before deciding which should mount first. Philip had his camera; Mary a sketch book and paint box; Alexis a basket for flowers. With them was a London friend, Clara Kelly, furnished with a stout stick for climbing the hills, which Philip averred was a weapon of defence from tramps. A scatter of smaller children followed, and a crowd of dogs.

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"We look as if we were starting upon a pilgrimage," said Clara.

"Who ever heard of a pilgrim with a camera?" said Gertrude, flicking the whip over the pony's ears.

So, with a laugh, they started.

The first flowers put in Alexis' basket were some heads of Plantain for Mary's birds. Plantain, which the boy assured his little cousins, turns once in seven years into a bird, and flies about as the cuckoo's mate the Dinnick. Mary had a prettier story to tell, the German legend of the maiden who waited years by the wayside for her lover, and dying, was changed into the Plantain that still waits by the roadside; so is

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called Waybread. In the Colonies, said Philip, it is Englishman's-foot, for wherever the colonist comes, the Plantain follows him.

They had reached a stile, and Mary remarked that if they took the short cut across the meadows they should be almost as quick as the ponies. So Philip helped Clara over, and the whole party were soon in the fields.

Much to Clara's amusement Alexis set the children searching for a four-leaved Clover.

"If you find one, you may have whatever you wish for; is not that so?" she said.

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"You can see the fairies," Alexis gravely told her.

"Or better perhaps," added Philip—

"'If you find an even Ash leaf, or a four-leaved Clover,
You will see your true love, ere the day is over.'

Besides it is a sure preservative from witches, both for men and cattle."

"Do not Clover and Wood Sorrel compete for the honour of being the Irish Shamrock?" asked Mary.

"They sell bunches of Clover in London on St. Patrick's Day," replied Clara.

And Mary sang as they walked along.

"Through Erin's Isle
To sport awhile

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As Love and Valour wandered,
With Wit, the Sprite
Whose quiver bright
A thousand arrows squandered.
Where'er they pass
A triple grass
Shoots up, with dew-drops streaming,
As softly green
As emeralds seen
Thro' purest crystal gleaming.
On the Shamrock, the green immortal Shamrock!
Chosen leaf
Of bard and chief
Old Erin's native Shamrock."

Clara had been gathering a bunch of Ox-eye Daisies, which Alexis called Dog Daisies, and the younger children Moon Pennies, a name taught by their nurse. Clara was telling her fortune by them after

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the fashion which has made the Germans call the flowers *Masz-Liebe*, Love Measure; plucking off the petals and saying as they fell, "He loves, he loves dearly, he loves not."

Alexis had gathered some of the Willow Herb, called "Codlings and Cream" and "Cherry-pie," from its sweet scent. There were Ragged Robins, too, and wild yellow Flag Irises in the marshy ground at the lower part of the meadow.

The sight of the flower led Philip to speak of those he had seen in Canada, where the Rose-bay Willow Herb,[1] cousin to that which Alexis held in his hand, is

[1] *Epilobium angustifolium;* also an English flower.

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known as Fire-weed, because it is always the first plant to grow in the burnt clearings. There the wild Irises are blue ones, the *fleur de luce* of Longfellow's poem, of which Mary recalled the lines—

"Thou art the Iris, fair among the fairest,
Who armed with golden rod,
And winged with the celestial azure, bearest
The message of some god."

"I have often wondered why those Irises seemed so unlike our own wild Irises," said Clara. "Can you explain something else—why there are so many wild flowers called Robin?"

"They are the specialities of Puck, Robin Goodfellow himself," replied Philip.

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"You are thinking of the Ragged Robin Alexis is gathering down there; sometimes they are called 'Poor William,' and in Salop they know them as Ragged Jack. They are quite flowers of the summer, for an old rhyme says—

"'When Barnaby bright smiles night and day,
Poor Ragged Robin blooms in the hay.'"

"Oh, dear," suddenly exclaimed Mary, "what is the matter now?"

One of the children had got stung by a Nettle, having failed to treat that "naughty man's plaything" with necessary firmness. "Nettles don't sting this year," her brother had said, tightly grasping the leaf; but

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poor little Nell had found to her cost that Nettles sting very smartly indeed. Alexis had found a Dock-leaf, and was effecting a cure by rubbing the white lumps while repeating three times—

"Out nettle, in Dock;
Dock shall have a new smock."

"Alexis is a mass of superstition," said Mary.

"I believe that there is really chemically something in Dock juice that relieves Nettle stings," Philip replied, in his cousin's defence. "Anyhow, it was immensely prized in old days, and known by the name of Herb Patience. Monk's

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Rhubarb is another old forgotten name, accounted for by Gerarde, who says that the monks used it instead of Rhubarb."

"I like its red-brown flowers," remarked Clara; "they look so nice with this pretty blue thing. What is this, Mary?—you know them all."

"Shame upon you for not recognizing Flax when you see it," laughed Mary. "Certainly you will never be visited by Goddess Hulda, who taught the maidens of the South Tyrol how to dress Flax and spin it, and twice every year visits the wheel by night to see how the work is done. The sowing of Flax is considered by the peasants of the Tyrol as a very

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solemn and mystic rite ; while even the Scotch Presbyterians say that it should be done before Good Friday."

They had now reached the other side of the meadows, and found Gertrude waiting for them, ready to drive Clara instead of Blanche if she were tired. But she declined, saying—

"We are having such a delicious walk, and are gathering flowers and fancies together, which makes the flowers much more interesting. I had no idea so many stories belonged to them. What lovely Honeysuckles! Gather me some, Alexis, and tell me all about it."

"I am afraid there is nothing to tell,"

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answered the boy. "I always think it is such a pity no legend belongs to such a pretty plant."

"The Germans call it '*Je langer je lieber*'—'The longer the more loving,'" remarked Blanche. "I always think it such a pretty idea."

"Suggesting Shakespeare's 'So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle gently entwist,'" added Philip.

"Now, then," cried Mary, "Alexis has brought us flower-lore enough to last for months," as the boy came down the hedge bank carrying a great bough of Elder, and inquiring whether the girls wanted to make elder-tea for their complexions.

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"We did once," said Gertrude, "in quite the proper style, making it late in the evening, and in a metal teapot, and leaving it where the *Flieder-Mutter* could come and sit in the teapot to charm our brew. But I must own that it did not turn out very well."

"I suspect you did not ask the Elder-mother's leave before you broke her branches," answered Alexis. "You should always demand three times, 'Hylde-moer, Hylde-moer, may I cut your branches?' before so doing."

"Is the Elder a lucky or an unlucky tree?" asked Philip.

Thereupon arose a sharp contention;

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but the notion of ill-luck prevailed, or rather, as Clara said, "the tree had to be so judiciously dealt with that those who forgot proper respect were likely to meet with dreadful misfortunes. No cradle nor household furniture should be made of Elder; and it is most unlucky to sleep under an Elder-tree, for those who do so will never wake. Hence, perhaps, the custom of planting it on graves: the Jewish cemeteries of Russia and Poland always have an Elder on every grave. It drives away evil spirits; but those who have the courage to stand beneath an Elder at midnight on Midsummer-eve will see the Elf King and all his train

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pass by. The Cross was made of Elder, and the peasants in many counties take care for that reason that none of its unlucky wood gets into their faggots. In Scotland they call it 'Bour-tree,' and say—

"'Bour-tree, Bour-tree, crooked rung,
Never straight, and never strong;
Ever bush, and never tree,
Since our Lord was hung on thee.'

But popular tradition also avers that Judas hung himself upon an Elder; and for that reason the fungus often found growing upon them is called 'Jew's' or 'Judas' Ear.'"

"I shall certainly keep clear of the

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Elder," said Clara. "Here is a pretty yellow flower. What is this?"

"Celandine," answered Gertrude.

"I thought that was the little yellow thing which flowers in spring," objected Clara.

"Wordsworth's favourite, that comes

> "'Telling tales about the sun
> When we've little warmth or none,'"

said Philip. "That is Celandine by courtesy; this in reality. The one is a Ranunculus; the other belongs to the Poppies. The *Chelidonium* is the real Swallow-wort, used by the swallow to open the eyes of their young; and hence (say the herbalists) their wonderful keenness of sight. It is

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even averred that, if the eyes of a swallow are put out, Celandine will restore their sight."

"I hope no one ever tried the horrid experiment," cried Mary.

"Here is another plant good for the eyes," exclaimed Alexis, pulling down the wild Fennel from the hedge.

"I think it is suggestive of roughness and coarseness, in spite of its delicate leaves," said Mary. "You know Longfellow's lines—

"'Above the lowly plants it towers,
The fennel with its yellow flowers,
And in an earlier age than ours
Was gifted with the wondrous powers
Lost vision to restore.

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It gave new strength and fearless mood,
And gladiators fierce and rude
Mingled it with their daily food:
And he who battled and subdued
A wreath of fennel wore.'"

"The field of Marathon was so called from the quantities of Fennel that grew there, Marathon being the Greek name of the plant," Philip told them.

"Why did Ophelia say, 'There's fennel for you'?" asked Clara.

"Signifying flattery. You will find it in Ellacombe's 'Plant-lore of Shakespeare.' 'Dare finocchio' was proverbial, in his days, of flattering."

The hedges as they passed them were festooned with Clematis, which the boys

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gathered, as specially appropriate to the occasion, from its name of "Traveller's Joy," "so called," said Gerarde, "'because it decked and adorned the waies where people travel.'"

Clara, although she called it "Virgin's Bower," did not know that the name was given the plant in honour of Our Lady, because

> "When Mary left us here below,
> The Virgin's Bower began to blow."
>
> *(Assumption, Aug. 15th.)*

And the "Old Man's Beard," for which she searched in vain, is, it was explained

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to her, the feathery seeds of the plant, that do not appear until late in the autumn.

"Now, why is Alexis gathering that insignificant little purple flower?" inquired Clara.

"Is it not strange that any plant should be at once so shabby-looking and so celebrated as Vervain?" Mary replied, taking the greyish-purple little flower from her cousin's hand. "The Romans reverenced it; their heralds wore it when proclaiming war; their priests when offering sacrifice. They strewed the temple with it, and with it swept the altars. The Druids treated it with as much respect as the sacred Mistle-

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toe itself. Later on it secured from witchcraft—

"'Vervain and Dill
Hinder witches of their will.'

"The banquet-hall sprinkled with water in which Vervain had been dipped insured a merry feast and pleasant guests. It preserved from infection, and children used to wear the roots of it tied round their necks with white satin ribbon. There is a charm for gathering it—

"'Hail to the Vervain,
Growing on the ground!
On the Mount of Olivet
First wert thou found.

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Thou art good for many an ill,
And healest many a wound:
In the name of sweet Jesus,
I pluck thee from the ground.'"

"And Mary has forgotten, or does not know," added Philip, "that not so very long ago gun-flints were boiled with Vervain to assure the hitting of the shot."

"Superstition does not die out, though some people would like to believe it," remarked Clara.

"There is St. John's Wort, to ward off witches and evil spirits from you," cried Alexis. "I say, Philip, don't you think our ancestors must have been very much afraid of hobgoblins? They

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kept so many things to defend them from their power. They used to hang St. John's Wort over the doors and windows upon Midsummer-eve, and leave it there for the year; then witches could not come in."

"Perhaps we should be better people now-a-days if we had their wholesome fear of evil, and belief in its perpetual presence among us," answered Philip. "In the Isle of Man," he continued, shunning the graver subject, "they say that, if you tread upon St. John's Wort after sunset, a fairy horse will rise and carry you about upon its back all the night, leaving you in the morning suddenly, wherever you may hap-

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pen to be at sunrise, to find the way home as best you may."

"By the doctrine of signatures the red spots on its leaves were thought Blood drops, and hence the plant was used for a wound salve, and thought so efficacious that the French called it *Tout-saine*, corrupted into our name of 'Tutsan'—All heal."

"Oh, Mary, do let us have some of those lovely Foxgloves!" cried Clara, interrupting her. "We must gather them before those wretched children have snapped all the blossoms."

Alexis was already preventing his cousins from blowing into the Foxgloves to make

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them pop, by telling them that they were destroying the homes of the little elves who creep into them at night, thereby calling them Fairies' Gloves.

"Are they really Foxgloves or Folks' —that is, Fairies'—Gloves?" said Clara.

"Not Foxgloves, but Fox-music—*Foxes-glew* in the Anglo-Saxon—because they are like those spikes of bells that the man we call the 'band in himself' wears upon his hat, and which was a favourite instrument in that day. The Norwegian Fox-bell explains that," replied Philip.

"Yet we must not rob the fairies," added Mary. "For the Irish call it Lusmore, the great herb, and especially be-

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stow it upon that good-tempered elf the Shefro; and the Welsh call it Goblin's Gloves. Christianity, of course, gave it a higher title, and the French call it *Gants de Notre Dame* and *Doigts de la Vièrge.* In German it is simply *Fingerhut;* and that takes us back to Alexis's favourite witches, for in some places Foxgloves are known as 'Witches' Thimbles.'"

"'Foxglove and Nightshade side by side,
Emblems of punishment and pride,'"

quoted Clara, thoughtfully. "The Foxglove, I suppose, is proud; it is so stiff and unbending; though I think Scott treated it unkindly. But why is the Nightshade punishment?"

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"Easier explained than the other," answered Philip. "Nightshade is Morral or Felon-wort, and grew under the gallows, thus, of course, representing punishment; but we usually call it by its prettier name of Bittersweet."

They were now nearly at the top of the hill, where Gertrude and the others awaited them. But, before arriving, a sight greeted their eyes that made Mary give a cry of delight. In a hollow on the hillside was a little lake, scarcely more than a pond, fringed with rushes, the water blue as the sky, and studded with innumerable Water-lilies.

"We must have some!" Mary cried;

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and forthwith Philip and Alexis rushed down the slope towards the water.

"You'll never get them," shouted Mary; they always grow where the water is so deep." And she stood half-laughing, half-anxious, to see the futile efforts made by her brother and cousin to reach the flowers.

But Clara was running down the slope after them, brandishing her crooked stick.

"Cockney that I am," she said, "I have found my stick of use, you see."

Philip took it, acknowledging its value, as with it he drew some of the white blossoms within reach.

"What is this—a mountain tarn?" inquired Clara.

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"No; a disused reservoir. I did not know that any Water-lilies grew here," Philip answered, as they slowly climbed the hill again with the flowers.

"They are so pretty; they remind one of—

"'Sabrina fair,
Listen where thou art sitting,
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair.'"

"Very pretty, but unreal, as Milton always is when he touches upon nature. Can you imagine any woman twisting these thick stems in her hair?"

"I think," said Clara, "that they are flowers more of foreign fancies than Eng-

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lish ones. I like the German idea that they are the Undines, and come up to the top of the water to see how the world looks."

"And the Dutch say that in carrying them it is very unfortunate to drop either flower, leaf, or petal," added Philip.

Mary was delighted to have the flowers when the three rejoined her; only sorry that Philip had not been able to secure a leaf as well.

"The stems are so tough," he said.

"That they are," cried Mary. "At home the squire's big pond is covered with them; there is a sharp slope down to the water, and when one of his boys, a child of three, was playing in the fields, he rolled

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down it and fell in. The hay-makers heard him cry, and rushed to the bank, dreadfully frightened, for the water is very deep. To their astonishment, they found the child quite safe, borne up by the great strong Water-lily leaves upon which he had fallen." [1]

Gertrude was full of regret when they came up to her that she had not been the first to see and secure the Water-lilies.

"You can look at them when we go home this evening," said Clara, to console her.

"They go under water at night," remarked Blanche.

[1] This story is perfectly true.

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"Do they?" asked Alexis. "I want to know for certain."

"You can look to-night and see," said Mary; "we are going home by moonlight."

They reached the hill, had their lunch, then scattered hither and thither on the moor. Mary had been sketching for nearly an hour, with occasional visits from one member or another of the party, when Alexis came and threw himself upon the turf beside her.

"There are a lot more story flowers," he said—"Heath, Eyebright, and Thistles."

"It seems to me," said Blanche, who had followed him, "that the flowers which look

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stupidest are the most interesting. That tiny Eyebright, for instance——"

"Was the very flower with which the Angel purged Adam's eyes that he might see the visions of the future," replied Alexis. "He called it Euphrasy, from Euphrasia, or Euphrosyne, who brought joy; and Culpepper remarks that, if more people used it, there would be less want of the spectacle trade."

"I am luckier than you," laughed Blanche, "for I have picked a sprig of White Heather—that brings luck. I don't believe you can tell me anything about Heather, except as being used for the badges of the Scotch clans."

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"And for lighting the beacon-fires upon the hill-tops from time immemorial," added Mary, looking up from her sketch. "In the 'Agamemnon' Æschylus speaks of the 'heap of dry heath,' touched with fire—one of the beacons signalling the fall of Troy."

"Alexis' love of flowers has even made him gather Thistles," remarked Blanche. "I could not do that; their prickles say so plainly 'Wha daur meddle wi' me?'"

To the cousins the homely rendering of the Scotch motto, "*Nemo me impune lacessit*," was new and delighted them. To some of the little ones who came up at the moment, Blanche told the story of the origin of the Scotch badge. How that

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the Danes invaded Scotland, and determined one night to surprise the Scotch camp. But one man trod with his bare foot upon a thistle, and crying out, awoke the Scots, who drove back their enemies with great slaughter, and ever since that day the Thistle has been the emblem of Scotland.

"Which Thistle is where doctors disagree," said Mary. "Do not some people say that it is the Blessed Thistle that grows upon the walls at Dumbarton, and was planted there by Mary Queen of Scots?"

"Shakespeare's Holy Thistle, the Carduus Benedictus, poor Beatrice was so teased about," answered Blanche. "There

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are white spots on the leaves, the marks, it is said, of the Blessed Virgin's milk dropped upon it. I think it is called Milk Thistle as well, from the legend. But, Alexis, what are these ?"

"Carline Thistles," replied the boy, "called after Charlemagne, who, when his army was suffering from the plague, was shown this Thistle by an angel, and used it to cure the soldiers."

Something more important than flowers now suddenly seized their attention — nothing less than a drop of rain, accompanied by a low growl of thunder. Mary hastily put up her sketch-book ; Alexis and Blanche summoned the stragglers ; and,

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in the middle of a heavy thunderstorm, they packed up their things, and hastened homewards.

"We shall not see whether the Water-lilies sink at night," Alexis mournfully remarked as they passed the pond.

"You may stay up here in the hut to watch them if you please," Mary told him.

It is to be feared that the rain which damped their enjoyment also washed away their good temper; for the party returned home by no means so pleasant to one another as when they started. And the provoking part of it was that, by the time they had been back for half an hour, and put on dry clothes, the rain had cleared

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off, leaving a beautiful rainbow spanning the hills opposite the sunset.

"Did you ever see anything so annoying?" Alexis said to Clara. "If we had stayed under shelter we could have come home by moonlight, and looked at the Water-lilies, as we planned—only Mary hurried us on so much."

"I love a rainbow," replied the girl, taking no notice of his complaints, "and so should you, for—

"'"'Tis the Heaven of flowers we see there,
All the wild flowers of the forest,
All the lilies of the prairie,
When on earth they fade and perish,
Blossom in that Heaven above us.'"

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WHAT SUMMER SOWED IN THE CORN.

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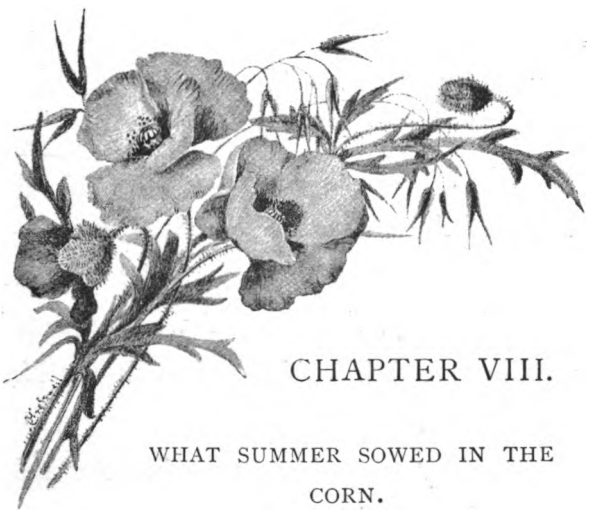

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT SUMMER SOWED IN THE CORN.

"I NEVER did see such a field!"

Farmer Giles made the remark to Alexis' uncle, with whom he was standing by the gate. Uncle Henry did not answer, and Alexis thought that he might put in a word.

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"It is very pretty," he said—"so full of flowers."

"Why, master, they be nothing but weeds!" the farmer replied, laughing.

Uncle Henry had to go and look at a barn close by, the roof of which wanted repairing, and he bid Alexis wait for him by the gate.

The boy turned to examine the field that had met with such censure. He was still of the opinion that it was a very pretty field. It had been sown with tares and oats mixed, to cut green for the horses; but with the original seed innumerable other plants had come up, nearly smothering the crop. Little field

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Convolvuluses had twined themselves around every oat stem, and lifted laughing pink and white flowers up to the sun. Poppies gleamed crimson; pale purple Scabious and dark Hard Heads rose above the Tares; some bits of Sainfoin had crept in by accident, and there were Corn Cockles all over the place.

"It certainly looks very pretty indeed," repeated the boy to himself; "but I wonder how they all came here."

"Summer sowed us among the corn," a Poppy close beside him replied. "Autumn is miserly and greedy of gain; Spring has to work hard for him; but

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to the long evenings laughing Summer comes, and sows flowers among the corn."

"Philip has often said that the wheat-fields in Canada, where there are no Poppies, look so dowdy," said Alexis, "but farmers don't say kind things of your Poppies."

"We are too sleepy to listen to their talk," answered the Poppy. "We are the emblems of sleep, of death even, yet also of fertility. Cybele the mother of the gods, wears a wreath of Poppies in her hair."

"Poor Cybele! I wonder how she likes?—

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"'Corn poppies that in crimson dwell,
Called Headaches from their sickly smell,'"

remarked Alexis.

"The old monks' rhyme will tell you that—

"'Poppies a sanguine mantle spread
For the blood of the dragon St. Margaret shed.'

For, when St. Margaret of Antioch killed the dragon, Poppies sprang up from his blood."

"They came up on the field of Waterloo, the first time it was ploughed after the battle," Alexis added; "and the Flemish peasants declared that they were the blood of those buried under the sod. Do you

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know that you Poppies were once made use of by Tarquinius Superbus, when his son sent to know how to govern a conquered city? Tarquinius gave no answer to the messengers, but took them into the garden, and there, still in silence, began cutting off the heads of the tallest Poppies. Then he sent the messengers away, bidding them tell his son what they had seen him do. He at once understood the meaning of the action, and put to death all the most eminent men of the town."

It was not very complimentary to Alexis' story, but the Poppies had gone fast to sleep.

"Never mind them, they are always

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half asleep," cried the beautiful purple Corn Cockles. "They are horrid flowers,

"'Joan's silver pin,
Fair without and foul within.'

For, if you pick them, they bleed a sticky yellow juice. Look at us, Alexis; we are Agrostemma, the Crown of the Field."

"Are you going to persuade me to exchange Cockles for Corn?" laughed Alexis. "Was it not of you that Gerarde the herbalist said, 'What hurte it doth among Corne, the spoile of bread, in taste and unwholesomeness, is better known than desired'? I am afraid that summer sows very mischievous flowers among the

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Corn, for down there I see the blue Corn-flower, which some people call Hurt Sickle, because it turns the blade with its rough stem."

"But we are Blue-bonnets in Scotland, and Blue-caps in Kent, and you yourself call us Blue-bottles," pleaded the Corn-flower. And then it reminded Alexis of Cyanus, who loved it so dearly that, as long as the flower blossomed, he daily wove them into garlands, to offer at the Temple of Flora. One day, however, he was found dead in the cornfields, his half-finished wreaths beside him; and Flora bade that the flowers he so loved should henceforth be called by his name: so

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Centaurea Cyanus it remains until this day.

"Why *Centaurea?*" asked Alexis.

"Because Chiron, the Centaur, first discovered that our flowers would make an eye lotion; even now the French make *Eau de casse-lunette* out of our blossoms."

"Wreaths more celebrated than those of Cyanus have been made of your flowers," said Alexis. "In the days when Napoleon's victories obliged the royal family of Germany to escape from Berlin, they had to rest in a cornfield, where the queen amused her children, and kept them quiet, by making garlands of the blue Cornflowers. This was one of Kaiser Wilhelm's

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earliest recollections of his mother, and for her sake he always loved the blue Corn-flower, and chose them for his especial flower."

"Once upon a time laws were made about us," cried the Corn Marigold, tired of being silent. "We are Goulds; the Scotch say 'Cargoulds'; and the farmer who let us grow in his field was fined a wether. A certain knight, Sir Ralph of Assheton, was so cruel in collecting this 'Gould Fine,' as it was called, that the people used to pray—

"'Sweet Jesu for Thy mercy's sake,
And for Thy bitter passion,

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Save us from the axe of the Tower,
And from Sir Ralph of Assheton.'

Now-a-days, by way of turning the tables, we are cultivated in gardens, and named Summer Chrysanthemums."

"Everything has its turn," said Alexis, swinging off the gate upon which he had been sitting, and gathering a flower of which only the seed-pods were left. But the long pods, as the boy knew, were what gave the plant its names: *Shepherd's Needle*, *Beggar's Needle*, *Hedge Hog*, *Our Lady's Needle*, and *Our Lady's Comb*— until the Reformers came, who took the plant away from the Blessed Virgin, gave

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it to a heathen goddess, and called it *Veuus' Comb.*

Nor would he go without plucking some of the pink Sainfoin, or Cockshead Clover, which whispered to him that, when the Christ Child lay in the manger at Bethlehem, the grass and herbs that served for His bed began to bud and blossom; and that from that time the Sainfoin (Holy Hay) has grown in the meadows. Close beside it grew the delicate purple Scabious, the Widow-flower; not only so called in England, but *Fleur de veuve* in France, and *Fiora della vedova* in Italy.

"Unlucky is the husband who gives me to his wife on parting," sighed the Sca-

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bious, "for he will never return, and she will be a widow indeed."

"Here is a flower I don't know—who are you?" asked Alexis, of a blue Daisy-flower growing close to the gate.

"You have heart of Chicory in your coffee, and Endive in your salad, Alexis," answered the flower. "I am Chicory, Succory, Endive. I am, say the Germans, the *Weg-wart*, the watcher of the road: once a maiden waiting for her lover, and waiting in vain, until dying she was changed into the blue flower that ever lingers by the roadside. Other legends say that we were men and women under a ban, condemned to wait solitary in the

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road. Carry us about with you, and those you love will believe you possessed of all the amiable qualities you wish for. But I must not be touched by the hand, but dug up with a gold or stag's-horn knife."

"I think I'll leave you where you are, and not try to appear better than I am," replied Alexis. "Here comes my uncle, so good-bye to you Summer's sowings. I'm afraid Shakespeare was right when he spoke of you as—

"'Rank Fumiter and furrow weeds,
With Burdocks, Hemlock, Nettles, Cuckoo flowers,
Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow
In our sustaining Corn.'"

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DAME NATURE'S GARDEN.

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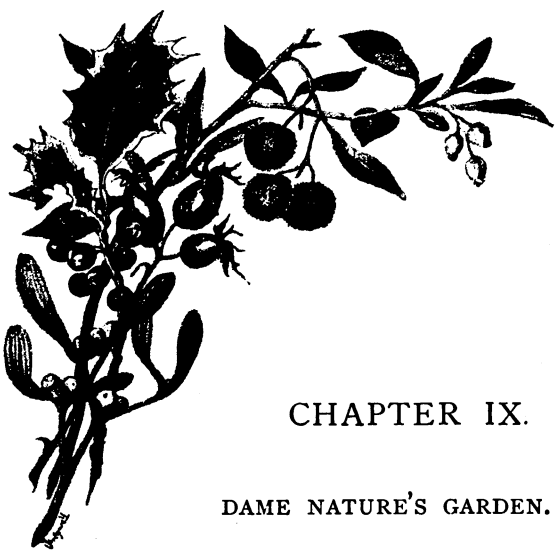

CHAPTER IX.

DAME NATURE'S GARDEN.

THE garden looked empty and bare; there were no flowers, and the borders showed nothing but labels. It was a stupid place, thought Alexis, as he strolled along the paths in the rose-garden with

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his hands in his pockets. He wished that he could live in some country where there were flowers all the year round.

And while he stood discontentedly kicking the gravel, he noticed a lady coming towards him. She was tall and fair, with a beautiful face that was neither young nor old, dressed in a sheeny green gown, which the boy thought the prettiest colour he had ever seen. Moreover, he had a sense of knowing her quite well, as she took his hand in hers and said—

"Come and see my garden."

"Are there any flowers in it?" asked Alexis.

She smiled. "There are always flowers

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in my garden," she replied; and, taking Alexis by the hand, she led him to the orchard gate, and thence into the road.

"Who are you?" Alexis demanded. "I am sure I have seen you before, yet——"

"I am your old nurse," answered the lady. "Yes, you know me well enough; I am Dame Nature, whom some call Bertha and Mother Holda; and I am ready to make friends with all my children if they will only try to know me."

Thus talking they reached the hill-top, crowned with the fading Heather, and upon every side the landscape sloped away into the woods and meadows. Alexis could

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see the brook flashing in the sunshine, and hear the murmur like the sea that sobs perpetually among the Fir-trees.

And Dame Nature bid him go where he liked, and do as he pleased; only she lingered by his side to see that no harm befell him, for there are hurtful, as well as wholesome, things in Dame Nature's garden.

Here the boy gathered Golden Rod, which was once brought to England from the East, and sold for half-a-crown the ounce as a healing herb, until people found that it grew in their own hedges, when they ceased to think it of any value; "which," quoth the herbalist Gerarde,

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"verifieth the old proverb, 'Far fetched and dear bought is best for the ladies.'" Close by the Golden Rod grew the Ragwort, that once had the evil reputation of being witches' horses, the nags upon which they rode to the devil. But Alexis could not help thinking that the Dodder was a far more evil plant than they when he saw how, leaving the firm earth, it clung to the Gorse, regardless of prickles, sucked all the life from the stronger plant, and tangled it with its long red hairs.

"Some day," whispered Dame Nature, "you shall go to that part of my garden where you can see the tall forest trees roofed over with parasite creepers, till the

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ground beneath is dark, and the sturdy branches knotted together are strangled and die. Far kinder is the Ivy, for she plants her little rootlets and clings, but sucks no nourishment from the tree that upholds her."

Alexis remembered the old lines that said—

"Ivy is soft and meeke of speech,
Against all bale she is bliss."

Ivy was the favourite crown for revellers, who liked drinking their wine out of Ivy cups because it was thought to prevent intoxication. So said some of the Puritanical writers—

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"At Christmas men do always Ivy get,
And in each corner of the house it set;
But why do they thus use that Bacchus weed?
Because they wish, then, Bacchus like to feed."

Another old idea was that Ivy was not fit to use inside the house, but must stay outside to decorate the stairs and the hall.

Something mysterious there always was in a parasite to men's minds, hence the many legends of the "Mystic Mistletoe," which Dame Nature now pointed out to Alexis growing upon a gnarled old Hawthorn. In the Northern mythology the story is told that Freya made all the plants swear not to injure her son, Baldur the Beautiful—all but the Mistletoe, which she

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thought too small and insignificant to matter. So one day all the gods were playing, and the game they chose was to throw all manner of weapons and dangerous things at Baldur to see them fly past without injuring him. Cunning Loki the Mischief Maker, who was jealous of Baldur, took a bough of Mistletoe, put it in the hand of Hodur, Baldur's blind brother, and, promising to guide his arm, persuaded him to throw it. Loki guided only too well. The Mistletoe bough struck Baldur and killed him. Long and sorrowful were the lamentations of the gods, and at length they resolved to bring Baldur back to life. And that the Mistletoe might injure him

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no longer, they gave it into Freya's keeping. It was never to be Loki's plant when it touched the earth. For this reason the Mistletoe bough is suspended from the ceiling, and youths and maidens passing underneath it give each other the kiss of peace, to signify that Mistletoe is no longer a herb of strife and mischief.

Some legends say that the Cross was made of Mistletoe, until that time a beautiful forest tree, but since then it has shrunk away into a miserable parasite.

"How unlike the Holly!" cried Alexis, looking at the bright berries above him, that were now ready for Christmas.

For the Holly is said to have made the

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crown of thorns, and the Germans call it "*Christdorn*"; yet the plant is blessed and honoured as bringing good fortune with it. Long before Christian times the Persian fire-worshippers revered the Holly, seeing in its bright leaves and berries some resemblance to their sacred element. The Romans, when they could not bring Oak to the temples of Jupiter, were bidden by the priests to bring Holly; then it became one of the decorations during the Saturnalia; and the Christian priests tried at first to prevent their converts from using it in the churches. Finding, however, that they could not get rid of the Holly, they made a virtue of necessity, changed its name into

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the Holy-tree, and saw in flower, leaf, and berry many a symbol significant of the Christian faith.

Nearly as bright as the Holly berries were those of the Black Bryony, St. Mary's Seal, twining in the hedge. At his old home Alexis remembered having gathered White Bryony, which Dame Nature assured him was no relation to the other, for the Black is only Bryony by courtesy. It was White Bryony that in olden days was used for making imitation mandrakes, and for many a strange enchantment, or worn round the neck to cure toothache.

"But we have not done with the flowers

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in my garden yet," added Dame Nature, gathering a handful of Toadstools, and offering them to Alexis.

"They are not flowers," he cried.

"They are, indeed, the fruit-bearing part of an underground root; so odd and mysterious is their growth, that in bygone days the Fairies were said to plant them. Those deep marks upon the meadows are fairy rings, and there where the grass is thickest you will find a circle of little brown Toadstools. They are Pixie-stools in Devonshire, where the Puff-ball is Pixie-puff; in other places it is Puck-fist, and Naughty-man's Snuff-box. Yet abroad in foreign countries they eat many a plant

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that here we call a poisonous Toadstool, and in Italy the Mushrooms you like so much are considered more unwholesome than any others. 'May he die of a *pratiola!*' is the worst wish an Italian can have for his enemy."

Down the moorland road walked Dame Nature as she talked, gathering here a bit of Lichen, and there a bunch of berries for Alexis. And they came to the edge of the marsh, which was once, she told him, a wood, until the trees had fallen and choked the way of the water, and the dead decaying leaves and boughs made peat. She showed him how the Bog-mosses died away underneath, but made fresh

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green tops perpetually; so that, for many feet beneath, a compact mass of dead Moss built up the bog. And she whispered of the great beasts that had wandered into the morasses and died there, the elks, and the mastodons; and the strange Fir cones and plant leaves.

"But they are in geology," objected Alexis.

"My child, there is no hard line where one science ends and another begins. Which do you think came first, the flowers, or the science that pulls the flowers to pieces. All the things in the world are one; only men have to learn them little by little. Yet there is no branch of

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learning but wants another to help in its perfection; they have no end, and no beginning."

"Then nothing is finished?" said the boy.

"It will be when you reach the other end of my garden," said Dame Nature; and Alexis wondered what she meant, and why she looked so grave.

But, as she spoke, they reached a gate, a high gate of golden work, with a bank on either side of it; and, when he looked through, Alexis thought that he could see a garden far lovelier than any he had ever imagined; and he fancied he saw children passing to and fro among the flowers.

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"Can we go in?" he said.

But Dame Nature shook her head, and drew him away after that little peep. "There begins the other side of my garden," she answered. "Some day you will go there, and see flowers far lovelier than any that grow here. But it will be a long while yet, and before the time comes you must learn all you can here, the better to appreciate the beauty that is seen upon the other side of Dame Nature's garden."

While she spoke, it seemed to Alexis that darkness suddenly fell. He could not see the lady in her green dress anywhere; the golden gate was gone, and he was

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there upon the moorland, alone in the open country, which is Dame Nature's garden.

CONCLUSION.

Alexis had no idea it was so late. He almost ran down the hill, with the flowers and berries in his hands. Upon nearing the house a disagreeable recollection that had troubled him all the afternoon recurred to his mind. Uncle Ralph was expected home that day; and all the family had agreed in saying that Uncle Ralph would know exactly what was to be done with Alexis—what school he should go to, what profession he should learn—in short, Uncle

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Ralph was to determine the boy's future life, and Alexis dreaded meeting him.

He was not sure by what train he was expected to come, and entered the house trying to console himself with the reflection that perhaps Uncle Ralph had not yet arrived.

Into the library walked the boy with his moorland spoils; the others were sitting there, all together, gathered round the tea-table in the firelight. Alexis could hardly see who was present.

"We have been looking for you, Alexis. Where have you been?" asked Mary.

His adventure yet fresh to his mind, the boy replied, unthinkingly—

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"In Dame Nature's garden."

"A pleasant place that; I hear you love it as much as I do," said a good-natured voice.

It was that learned and travelled individual, the formidable Uncle Ralph.

Alexis seemed to forget that he had been afraid of him. Sitting by his side he displayed the heap of flowers and berries in his hands, and the two were soon talking as if they had known each other for years. Indeed, in all that household the boy seemed the chosen and favourite companion of the learned man, and more in sympathy with him than any one else. Alexis even ventured, after he had known his

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uncle for a few days, to question him about that mysterious other side to Dame Nature's garden.

"I know of its existence well enough, my child," Uncle Ralph replied, "but what we shall find when we get there no one knows. Only this we can well believe, it will surpass all our expectations. As each new spot discovered in this world astonishes men with its wonder and its beauty; so, and far more, will that garden astonish us with its marvels when we pass through the gate. And be sure that, the more we know about this side of Dame Nature's garden, the better we shall understand the other."

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That Dame Nature herself had said; Uncle Ralph did but repeat her words. For a moment or two he was silent; then turning to the boy, he said—"Alexis, will you come and work with me?"

"Travel with you? Explore new lands with you?" cried the boy enthusiastically. "Will you really take me?"

"Yes, in a year or two, when you are older and know more; and you, for your part, must pass the intervening time learning everything that will be of use both to yourself and to me. Remember that no knowledge ever comes amiss, and that there is one book always open before you —the book of Nature."

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So ends the book, but not the story ; for the stories Dame Nature tells have no end. You may imagine for yourselves what Alexis did among the flowers and forests of distant countries, making friends with new blossoms, learning their tales, and many another strange story besides ; ever perfecting himself in Nature's secrets, until the time shall come when he will reach the other side of Dame Nature's garden.

THE END.

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